



September 28, 2001
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The Human Response to Tragedy

By Doug Crowe Sr., Psychologist, Kentucky Employee Assistance Program

Imagine the time you were the most frightened. Close your eyes and put yourself back there for a few seconds. What are you thinking, feeling emotionally, and experiencing physically during this time? Now, come back to the here and now and examine your thought and feelings. How much were you able to recapture, re-experience, in your mind? "In your mind" are the key words. For though the events are really not happening again, the emotionally laden thoughts cause you to "feel" like you are going through it all again.

Following the recent terrorist attacks and subsequent death, destruction, and ongoing rescue and cleanup activities, many are glued to their televisions or radios seeking the latest information available. The events, and the feelings they have left us with, are significant grief and loss issues.

It is normal to feel overwhelmed in certain abnormal situations. Others are likely feeling as bad or worse. Those actually involved may delay reactions until much later, after the stressful event. When these thoughts and emotions continue, prolonged "normal" reactions may result in "symptoms."

These might include fatigue, nausea, chest pain, and other physical symptoms. Cognitive symptoms could include poor attention, mental

confusion, memory problems, and nightmares. Emotional symptoms include anxiety, guilt, grief, denial, uncertainty, anger, or loss of hope. Changes in behavior include social withdrawal, suspiciousness, increased alcohol or medication consumption, and change of appetite. Symptoms that continue and intensify can overwhelm coping mechanisms and result in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Early intervention beats crisis intervention every time. Though nothing can change or recall the particular tragic event, here are some "To Do's" that may be helpful toward reducing your reactions to the negative concomitants of the above. Above all, remember that many times the event, sadly, cannot be changed, we can only direct our response and subsequent course of action.

In response to the question, "What can I do?," below are some responses and activities to shift your focus away from negative thoughts.

What can I do?

1. Be familiar with your office's Emergency Response Plan. I have one in my desk at my office. It is in a folder with a Day-Glo orange tab so that I may find it quickly. It's kind of comforting in its own way, just having it. Be aware of various exits, tornado shelters, and evacuation meeting places so that a "nose count" can be quickly made.
2. Have a "hot sheet" with phone numbers and contact persons quickly available. Have the main emergency number on an orange or red sticker immediately adjacent to your phone's keypad.
3. Talk with but don't try to "diagnose" others. Listen and suggest a call to KEAP, the Kentucky Employee Assistance Program, or a treatment professional, if the reactions are prolonged or out of perspective to the event. There may be other things going on in the person's life

that are exacerbated by present negative events.

4. KEAP is available for you to call and discuss situations, situations that may leave you with a "Yuck" feeling. By the way, a new service for the upcoming holidays will be here soon. Confidential on-line Depression and Alcohol Problems Screenings will be available beginning October 10. The screenings will also be available through a private phone call to 1-877-769-5040. Details will soon be available on the Personnel Cabinet Web-site and in the next *Commonwealth Communiqué*, which is scheduled for distribution on Oct. 30.
5. Make everyday decisions. This helps refocus your thinking into more manageable and predictable activities.
6. Talk with others, reach out to others, volunteer in relief efforts or give blood.
7. Do not make any major decisions for the time being.
8. Increase your physical activity and maintain healthy diet and sleep patterns.
9. Do not use alcohol or drugs as coping mechanisms, they have significant inherent problems of their own and never change the precipitating event.
10. Learn deep breathing, visualization, and relaxation exercises. Take a class or check out a library book to learn the routine.
11. Remember, you are normal, stress is normal, and grief and loss reactions are normal. Recent events are abnormal. Time, taking action in the present, sharing with others, and restoring a sense of hope will help allay our normal reactions to these abnormal events.

**Kentucky Employee
Assistance Program**
502-564-5788
800-445-5327

Gov. Patton's Office of Early Childhood Development Offers Disaster Coping Tips

Governor's Office



Governor Paul E. Patton and his office of Early Childhood Development are working together to help parents and their children deal with the national tragedy of Sept. 11.

"Our families and our communities have always been our strength," Governor Patton said. "Helping children to feel safe within their homes and with their neighbors and friends are more important than ever."

Patton's office of Early Childhood Development has created some guidelines and suggestions for parents to consider when explaining Tuesday's events to their children.

- Make time to comfort and reassure your children
- Speak simply and honestly about the situation
- Listen and acknowledge children's feelings
- Limit television viewing
- Reassure children about the family's safety
- Maintain routines or rituals of comfort
- Provide hope for the future

"If parents can take a little *extra* time to stop and to hug their children and to talk to them, this action is especially helpful in reassuring children that they are safe," said Kim Townley, executive director of the office of Early Childhood Development. "Engaging in comforting routines such as bedtime stories or songs can help. While talking to children, don't deny their expressions of fear and of concern, but do not scare them by exposing them to more than they can understand."

"Young children have precious spirits that we must attend to with love and care during this time when the world is so upsetting," she added.



Thousands Visit CFC Fair Display

*By Anya Armes Weber, CFC
Communications*

Thousands of fairgoers from Kentucky, neighboring states and other countries visited the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children's State Fair exhibit this summer.

More than 7,200 visitors toured the CFC "office" and "home" and took the State Fair Quiz, learning about our agencies' services and becoming eligible to win prizes. Six lucky visitors won the grand prizes: a food basket, a basketball, a picnic basket, a rocking chair, a baby carrier and patio furniture. Prizes have been delivered to the winners, who all live in Kentucky.

Kids left their own special mark on the exhibit. About 2,800 children added a link with their name to our colorful paper chain, connecting them with each other.

Thanks to all CFC employees who visited the exhibit and to those who worked at the display and pitched in toward its success. Special thanks go to the State Fair planning team, builders, shift captains, audio specialists and people who donated services and loaned props.

Visitors could submit questions or comments about the Cabinet. A Louisville man left this message:

"Thank you for helping people with their problems. When I was growing up, I didn't have anyone to help me. So I am very proud that there are people that can help now. Thank you."

The planning team wants to teach more people how the Cabinet can help. We want our display to be even better in years to come. Do you have any comments or ideas to improve the CFC State Fair display? Send your ideas to Anya.Weber@mail.state.ky.us.

Women's Health Resource Center Available On Web

Cabinet for Health Services

The Office of Women's Physical and Mental Health has launched a "Women's Health Resource Center" on its website with information on numerous health topics affecting Kentucky's women.

Available with each health topic are hundreds of toll-free hotlines, a listing and links to federal and state offices and organizations, and local resources and statewide statistics -- all specific to each health topic.

The website address is:
<http://chs.state.ky.us/womenshealth/>

The website also includes an events calendar which provides information on upcoming conferences, meetings, and other events related to women's health.

Visitors to the website may order **one free copy** of the 2002 Women's Health Data Report which will be released in early 2002. They can submit their request on-line and also join the women's health mailing list. Once published, the report will be available to view and download from the website.

"The goal of an internet-based women's health resource center is to effectively reach women throughout Kentucky with relevant health information and resources to improve both their physical and mental well being," said Gwen Mayes, executive director of the Office of Women's Physical and Mental Health, based in the Cabinet for Health Services. "By raising health awareness, providing answers to many women's health questions, and linking them to appropriate resources, the resource center has the potential to help women make good health a habit."



A Message from Secretary Miller: Clean-up Day 2001

Many of you may remember that we have previously had clean-up days here at Quality Central. I think it is time that we do it again. This will give us an opportunity to make our offices a place of which we can be proud and, at the same time, make our work space more efficient. I know that we all are hesitant to "throw anything away", but in order to conserve file cabinet and work space, it is necessary that we periodically do this.

We have designated October 19, 2001 as our official "Clean-Up Day." We have worked with the Building Superintendent and they will help us by providing trash bins and cleaning supplies. We will have these bins on the 1st, 3rd and 4th floors in the area around the escalators/elevators. We will also have a place in this same area which will be designated for surplus items that you no longer need in your offices. If any surplus items have an inventory number, please be sure to e-mail the information to Godwin Onodu in order that the item may be removed from your inventory.

Let's make this day fun, as well as productive. Everyone can wear jeans so that we can clean and then if your office would like, you may have snacks, potluck, etc. during the day.

As usual, I know that you will do your part in cleaning up the complex. Thanks for your cooperation as we try to make our offices the best in State Government.



Sick Leave Needs

Maurica Ellis, OPE, is in need of donated sick leave. To donate leave time, contact Gloria Calhoun at 564-5402.



You Could Save a Life: Donate Blood



The American Red Cross will be accepting blood donations in the Health Services Building Auditorium for CFC, as well as CHS employees, on Monday, Oct. 1 and Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2001.

Please contact your area recruiter or call Martha Robertson at 564-7770 to schedule an appointment.



EAL: A Continuous Effort

EAL continues to make a difference in our daily routines here at CFC. EAL has given us all the opportunity to learn about each other and sharpen our professional skills.

If you know someone who continually radiates the values projected by EAL, we want to know. Contact Jean Kendell with information on those who use EAL proficiently in their work habits. We want to tell their stories.

Send items to:
<mailto:jean.kendell@state.ky.us>

Health Insurance Enrollment Ends Friday

By Anya Armes Weber, CFC Communications

Friday, Sept. 28, is the deadline for submitting 2002 health insurance and flexible spending account forms. Return completed paperwork to the CFC Personnel Office by that day. If you have any questions about the insurance plans or forms, call Personnel at 564-7770.

